

DRINKING WATER TREATMENT AND DISTRIBUTION OPERATOR CERTIFICATION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

These FAQs are intended as a guide to the applicable law and regulations, which apply to all operators. Please consult the requirements in Health and Safety Code and California Code of Regulations.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Q-1. Where can I get a copy of the operator certification regulations?

- A. The operator certification regulations are available on the Drinking Water Program's website.
<http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/ddwem/technical/certification/opcert.html>

Q-2. Who must be certified?

- A. All individuals who operate or supervise the operation of a drinking water treatment facility must possess a *water treatment operator certificate*.

An individual who makes decisions addressing the operational activities identified in Subsection 63770(b) must possess a *distribution operator certificate*.

An individual who makes decisions addressing the operational activities identified in Subsection 63770(c) must possess a distribution operator certificate or possess a treatment operator certificate and have appropriate training to make such decisions. An individual who makes decisions addressing the operational activities identified in Subsection 63770(d) must possess either a distribution operator certificate or a treatment operator certificate.

Q-3. How do I become certified?

- A. Under the regulations adopted in January 2001, becoming certified is a two-step process, and two applications are required. An exam application and filing fee is submitted to participate in the examination. This application will be evaluated to determine if it meets the requirements of the regulations, especially the **educational** requirement. Once that application has been approved you will be allowed to take the examination.

If you are successful in passing the examination, you will have three years (from the date of the exam) to submit a certification application. This application will be evaluated to determine if it meets the regulatory requirements, especially the **experience** portion of the requirements. If you fulfilled all of the requirements

you will be issued a certificate. If you have not fulfilled the requirements your application will be held for a period of one year (from the date it was received in this office) in order for you to obtain the necessary experience. *(Please note: all education requirements must be fulfilled before you are allowed to take an examination; all experience requirements must be fulfilled before you are issued a certificate.*

Q-4. If I submit an application, for either examination or certification, and I do not meet the requirements, will I get a refund of my filing fee?

- A. No. If you are unsure of the minimum qualifications for either taking an examination or becoming certified, please contact this office for clarification. Your application will not be evaluated over the telephone, but the analyst will explain the requirements clearly enough for you to make your own determination.

Q-5. When the application requests verification of specialized training or verification of a college degree, what documentation must I submit?

- A. A legible photocopy of either an **official** transcript (issued to you by the college) or certificate of completion must be submitted with your application. The documentation must indicate the name of the course and the number of units (or hours) you were awarded for successful completion of the course.

Q-6. What do the "Ts" and "Ds" mean on the operator certificate, distribution system classification, and treatment facility classification?

- A. Either a "T" or a "D" now precedes all operator grades, as well as treatment facility classifications and distribution system classifications. A "T" prefix is used to indicate treatment and a "D" prefix is used to indicate distribution.

Q-7. At what grade must an operator be certified?

- A. If an operator has been designated by the water supplier as the Chief Operator or Shift Operator, the operator must be certified at the level specified by the following table. Operators that have not been designated as Chief or Shift Operator may be certified at any grade.

Treatment/Distribution Classification	Min. Certification of Chief Operator	Min Certification of Shift Operator
T1/D1	T1/D1	T1/D1
T2/D2	T2/D2	T1/D1
T3/D3	T3/D3	T2/D2
T4/D4	T4/D4	T3/D3

T5/D5

T5/D5

T3/D3

Q-8. If a water distribution system or treatment facility has only one Chief Operator, can that operator ever go on vacation?

- A. The regulation specifies the following requirements: each distribution system and treatment facility must designate (1) at least one Chief Operator for each system or facility, and (2) at least one Shift Operator for each operating shift.

In addition, the regulation requires that either the Chief or Shift Operator must be available as specified. The regulation does not require both the Chief and Shift Operator to be available. However, it is important to keep in mind that the Chief Operator is the individual who has overall responsibility for the operation of the distribution system or treatment facility and, therefore, it is the Chief Operator's decision to determine whether or not a Chief Operator should be available at all times and whether or not the Chief Operator can be absent for a period of time without designating a replacement Chief Operator. If a replacement Chief Operator is designated, that operator must be certified at a level equal to or greater than the system or facility.

Q-9. What water systems will need certified water treatment and distribution operators?

- A. As required by the existing law (Section 106885, Health and Safety Code), all public water systems that have water treatment facilities will require certified water treatment operators, except that certain water systems, as defined in section 63750.95 of the regulations, that only use disinfection facilities for groundwater, where no Giardia or virus reduction is required, can meet the operator certification requirements with a certified distribution operator. All community and nontransient noncommunity public water systems with or without water treatment facilities must have certified distribution operators.

Q-10. If I lose my original certificate can I get a new one?

- A. Yes. You must send a written request to this office including your name, address, operator number, grade, and the reason for your request. Send this information along with check or money order in the amount of \$25, made out to the DHS-OCP.

Q-11. What are the operator certification requirements for a transient, non-community water system?

Type of Water Source	Type of Treatment	Type of Certification Required
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Groundwater	None	None required
Groundwater	Chlorination	Distribution or Treatment
Groundwater	Other treatment	Treatment
Groundwater Under the Direct Influence of Surface Water	Chlorination/Filtration-disinfection	Treatment
Surface Water	Filtration and Disinfection	Treatment

EXAM REQUIREMENTS

Q-1. When are certification exams offered?

- A. Distribution exams are offered twice a year in February and August. The final filing date for the February exam is December 1 and the final filing date for the August exam is June 1.

Treatment exams are offered twice a year in May and November. The final filing date for the May exam is March 1 and the final filing date for the November exam is September 1.

Q-2. How do I know what to study for the examination?

- A. The document called *Expected Range of Knowledge* tells you for each grade level what can be on the exam. Also, under *Suggested Reading*, reference materials are suggested.

Q-3. What is considered acceptable specialized training to qualify for the examination?

- A. Specialized training is defined in section 63750.75, but generally means college level courses providing training in drinking water treatment or drinking water distribution offered by an accredited academic institution or an organization accredited by the International Association of Continuing Education Training (IACET).

Q-4. How do I know if a course I took will be acceptable as a specialized training course?

- A. The DDWEM has prepared a list of courses that it has determined meet the requirements in the regulations. The list is on our website under *Specialized Training Courses*. If it is not listed you can compare the course to the *Specialized Training Guidance* document to see if it qualifies.

Q-5. I have taken several short courses over the last year for continuing education that add up to 36 contact hours. Will that be acceptable as specialized training?

A. No. A specialized training course is defined in the regulations as a single course providing a minimum of 36 contact hours long.

Q-6. I have not completed any specialized training courses but I do have a college degree. Will my degree qualify me to take the exam?

A. No. A college degree will not meet the specialized training requirement but some of the courses you took while obtaining your degree may qualify as specialized training. Compare your courses to the *Specialized Training Guidelines* available on our website, and section 63750.75 of the regulations.

Q-7. I took a specialized training course ten years ago. Will you accept that?

A. Yes, as long as that course meets the regulatory requirements.

Q-8. If I already used a course to get into the Grade 2 exam can I submit that course again for the Grade 3 exam?

A. Yes.

Q-9. Can I take an exam without having any operator experience?

A. Yes. There are no experience requirements to take an exam. Experience is required to become certified at grade 3 and above for both water treatment and water distribution. You should review the certification experience requirements before you apply for an exam to make sure you can meet those qualifications.

Q-10. Can I skip the Grade 1 exam and take the Grade 2 exam instead?

A. Yes, as long as you meet the grade 2 exam requirements.

Q-11. What do I need to bring with me to the examination?

- A.
1. The exam admittance card sent to you by this office
 2. Valid government-issued photo ID. Picture ID is mandatory for admittance into the exam. Acceptable forms of ID are driver's license, DMV non-driver ID, or current U.S. passport.
 3. Simple electronic calculator. No programmable calculators, calculators with an alpha keyboard, or calculators with tape print-out are allowed.
 4. A supply of sharpened No. 2 pencils with erasers.

Q-12. What happens if I arrive at the exam late?

- A. Doors normally open at the testing site at 12:00 p.m. and the exam starts promptly at 1:00 p.m. There will be no admittance into the examination after the proctor has begun giving the exam instructions. If you appear after the exam has started you will be given information on how to reschedule to the subsequent examination date.

RENEWAL AND CONTINUING EDUCATION (CE) REQUIREMENTS

Q-1. How will I know when it's time to renew my certificate?

- A. The Department will send a courtesy renewal notice to the operator when it is time to renew the certificate. However, it is ultimately the operator's responsibility to keep track of the certificate's expiration date and to submit the renewal application during the appropriate time frame. It is also the responsibility of the operator to notify the Department within 60 days of any change in address or name (section 63840(a)).

Q-2. How much continuing education is required to renew my certificate and when must I get it?

- A. Water treatment and distribution certificates must be renewed every three years and obtaining CE contact hours is a requirement for renewal. The number of hours depends on the level of certification. These contact hours must be obtained between your renewal dates.

<u>Certificate Grade</u>	<u>Contact Hours Required</u>
T1 or D1	12
T2 or D2	16
T3 or D3	24
T4 or D4	36
T5 or D5	36

Q-3. Does safety training count towards the CE requirement?

- A. Operators may fulfill up to 25 percent of the required contact hours with safety training.

Q-4. What evidence should I keep in my records to prove that I've completed the required number of CE contact hours?

- A. You should keep a copy of the certificate of completion, course syllabus or outline, record of the course title, CE Provider, contact number, location of the course, number of contact hours, and the date it was completed. You will be required to submit the information listed in section 63840(b)(3) of the regulations with your renewal application.

QUESTIONS SUPPLIERS MAY ASK

Q-1. How will I know what my treatment and distribution system classifications are?

- A. The Drinking Water Field Operations Branch (DWFOB) will classify treatment facilities and distribution systems. Sections 64413.1 and 64412.3 of the regulations provide very specific classification criteria. If you have any questions you should contact your DWFOB field office.

Q-2. If the water supplier hires a contractor to do work on the distribution system, does the contractor need to be certified?

- A. If they make any decisions addressing the operational activities specified in Section 63770 they must be certified.

Q-3. Does a certified distribution operator need to be on-site?

- A. If it is necessary to be on-site to make decisions addressing the operational activities specified in Section 63770. If the certified operator can make an informed decision based only on information received over the telephone, or by other means, without actually being on-site to gather the information, then that operator does not need to be on-site.

Q-4. Does a water system that provides only disinfected groundwater need to employ a certified treatment operator?

- A. If the treatment facility is not required to provide Giardia or virus inactivation pursuant to Section 64654(a), a certified treatment operator is not required. However, a certified distribution operator is required. Additionally, if the DWFOB determines that site-specific circumstances warrant the use of a certified treatment operator, that requirement can be made a condition of the water system permit.

Q-5. Can a single operator serve as the Chief Operator for both the distribution system and the water treatment facility?

- A. Yes, as long as the operator is certified at the appropriate level for both treatment and distribution, the operator may serve as the Chief Operator for both.

CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

Q-1. I passed the T3 exam but do not have experience as a T3 operator what are my options?

- A. You can apply for certification as a T2 operator. If you are able to meet the T3 experience requirements within three years of passing the exam you can then apply for T3 certification.

Q-2. I supervise a crew of six distribution operators who perform water distribution duties. Do I get experience credit for supervising this crew?

- A. Not for simply supervising the actions of others. The regulation defines operator experience in the following way. 'Operator experience' means the daily performance of activities consisting of the control or oversight of any process or operation at a water treatment facility or in a distribution system that may affect the quality or quantity of water." Control or oversight of distribution operators is not the same as having control or oversight of a process or operation in a distribution system. The processes or operations referred to in the definition are those processes that require distribution certification as defined in section 63770 of the regulations such as installing, tapping, disinfecting, flushing and connecting water mains.

Q-3. In my job I perform both water treatment and distribution duties. How will you determine my distribution experience?

- A. Many operators perform both water treatment and water distribution duties. The DDWEM analyst will request a letter from your immediate supervisor or Chief Operator to determine how much time you spend performing each function.

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For more information about Drinking Water Treatment and Distribution Operator Certification,
please call the Certification Unit.
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